

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY

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FOR TTBT/PNE DEL

E.O. 11652: N/A TAGS: PARM

SUBJECT: ARTICLE ON PNES

1. FOR YOUR INFO, MAR 4 L.A. TIMES CARRIES MOSCOW ARTICLE
BY ROBERT C. TOTH, TEXT FOLLOWS:

2. BEGIN TEXT. SOVIET AND AMERICAN NEGOTIATORS HERE ARE
IN THE FINAL PHASE OF TALKS AIMED AT, AMONG OTHER THINGS,
PERMITTING MUTUAL ON-SITE INSPECTION OF PEACEFUL NUCLEAR
BLASTS FOR EXCAVATING CANALS, BUILDING RESERVOIRS AND THE
LIKE.

IF THE TWO SIDES CAN HAMMER OUT AGREEMENT ON DETAILS, THE
ACCEPTANCE OF AMERICAN OBSERVERS AT SOVIET BLAST SITES FOR
PEACEFUL PURPOSES COULD OPEN THE DOOR TO ON-SITE INSPECTION
FOR WEAPON-LIMITING TREATIES IN THE FUTURE. SUCH TREATIES
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NOW ARE VERIFIED BY SATELLITES.

THE RUSSIANS ACCEPTED THE PRINCIPLE OF ON-SITE INSPECTION OF PEACEFUL EXPLOSIONS IN JULY, 1974, WHEN FORMER PRESIDENT RICHARD M. NIXON AND SOVIET LEADER LEONID I. BREZHNEV, SIGNED A TREATY TO LIMIT ALL UNDERGROUND NUCLEAR TESTING. THE KREMLIN LEADERS, WHO FOR DECADES HAD ARGUED THAT THE PURPOSE OF ON-SITE INSPECTION WAS TO GET "SPIES" INTO THEIR TERRITORY HAVE CONTINUED TO BACK THE PRINCIPLE.

AS NOW ENVISAGED, THE NEW AGREEMENT WOULD NOT PERMIT INSPECTION OF THE NUCLEAR DEVICE ITSELF PRIOR TO THE EXPLOSION. BUT THE VARIOUS SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS THE FOREIGN OBSERVERS WOULD BRING SHOULD TELL THEM AFTERWARDS WHETHER THE BLASTS HAD ANY "WEAPONS-RELATED BENEFITS."

THE SOVIET UNION HAS BEEN ARGUING DOGGEDLY, IT IS UNDERSTOOD, TO LIMIT THE NUMBER OF OBSERVERS, THEIR EQUIPMENT AND EVEN THEIR PERSONAL EFFECTS. VIRTUALLY EVERYTHING THEY WOULD CARRY, DOWN TO TOOTHBRUSHES, IS SUBJECT TO NEGOTIATION HERE.

THE MOMENTUM OF THE TALKS IS SUCH THAT THEY SHOULD END THIS MONTH IN AGREEMENT OF SOME KIND. HOWEVER, A FEW ISSUES MAY WAIT FOR FINAL RESOLUTION AT A WASHINGTON SUMMIT MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT FORD AND BREZHNEV, WHO WOULD THEN SIGN THE PACT.

DISCUSSIONS ON PEACEFUL NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS (CALLED THE PNE TALKS) HAVE HELD UP RATIFICATION BY BOTH COUNTRIES OF THE BROADER TREATY TO LIMIT ALL UNDERGROUND SHOTS, FOR BOTH MILITARY AND NONMILITARY PURPOSES.

SIGNED HERE BY BREZHNEV AND NIXON ON JULY 3, 1974, IT PROVIDED THAT MILITARY TESTS WOULD BE RESTRICTED IN SIZE TO 150 KILOTONS (EQUAL TO 150,000 TONS OF TNT) AND TO EXISTING WEAPONS TEST SITES IN BOTH COUNTRIES.

PEACEFUL EXPLOSIONS OFF MILITARY RESERVATIONS WERE TO HAVE BEEN DEALT WITH PROMPTLY FOLLOWING THAT SUMMIT AND THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OVERALL PACT COVERING BOTH KINDS OF BLASTS WAS TO HAVE BEEN RATIFIED AND GONE INTO EFFECT BY MARCH 31 OF THIS YEAR.

BUT THE PNE PROBLEM WAS MORE DIFFICULT THAN FIRST EXPECTED. BECAUSE OF IT, THE TREATY HAS ALMOST NO CHANCE OF FORMALLY TAKING EFFECT BY THE END OF THIS MONTH, EVEN IF THE PNE TALKS ARE COMPLETED BY THEN.

PROGRESS SO FAR SHOWS BOTH SIDES REMAIN INTERESTED IN REACHING AGREEMENT, HOWEVER, AND THERE SEEMS LITTLE CHANCE THAT THE 1974 DEAL WILL FALL THROUGH BECAUSE OF THE DELAYS.

THE UNITED STATES HAS NO PNE PROGRAM NOW AND NONE IS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE TO FOLLOW ON THE PLOWSHARE EFFORT OF A DECADE AGO.

THE SOVIET UNION HAS AMBITIOUS SCHEMES IN THE FIELD, HOWEVER. IT CONTENDS THAT, IN GENERAL, USING NUCLEAR DEVICES SAVES TWO-THIRDS THE COST OF USING CONVENTIONAL EXPLOSIVES. AND WITH ITS VAST, SPARSELY POPULATED REGIONS, POTENTIAL HAZARDS LIKE FALLOUT ARE LESS ACUTE.

THE RESULT IS THAT SOVIET TERRITORY WOULD BE OPENED INITIALLY TO ON-SITE OBSERVATION WITH NO IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS THAT THIS WOULD BECOME A TWO-WAY STREET.

THE MOST SPECTACULAR SOVIET SCHEME IS TO DIVERT ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF THE WATER FROM A NORTH-FLOWING RIVER INTO A NEW CANAL LEADING TO A VOLGA TRIBUTARY, AND HENCE SOUTH INTO THE CASPIAN SEA. THE PURPOSE IS TO STABILIZE THE FALLING WATER LEVEL IN THAT SEA.

THE CANAL, RUNNING FROM THE PECHORA RIVER TO THE VOLGA BRANCH, THE COLVA, IS TO BE 113 KILOMETERS (70 MILES) LONG, INCLUDING A 65-KILOMETER STRETCH THROUGH ROCKY HIGHLANDS. THIS PORTION WOULD BE EXCAVATED BY DETONATING 250 NUCLEAR CHARGES OF UP TO 3 MEGATONS (3 MILLION TONS OF TNT EQUIVALENT) IN ROWS OF UP TO 20 CHARGES EACH.

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THE RUSSIANS ESTIMATE, ACCORDING TO "NEW TIMES," A SOVIET FOREIGN AFFAIRS WEEKLY, THAT BY USING NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVES, THE CONSTRUCTION COST WILL BE CUT TO ONE-THIRD THAT OF CONVENTIONAL EXPLOSIVES AND CONSTRUCTION TIME WILL BE SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED.

AMERICAN EXPERTS AND SOME SOVIET SCIENTISTS ARE SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE PROJECT ON ECOLOGICAL AND ENGINEERING GROUNDS. SOME AMERICAN EXPERTS ALSO BELIEVE THE JOB COULD BE DONE WITH ORDINARY TNT AT ONLY SLIGHTLY MORE COST THAN WITH NUCLEAR DEVICES.

BUT SOVIET CHAMPIONS OF THE PROJECT NOTE THAT SUCH HUGE AMOUNTS OF CONVENTIONAL EXPLOSIVES ARE NOT AVAILABLE. THEY SAY THE ENTIRE WESTERN OUTPUT OF CONVENTIONAL EX-

PLOSIVES EACH YEAR IS ONLY EQUAL TO ABOUT A 1-MEGATON
HYDROGEN DEVICE. END TEXT KISSINGER

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